NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

THE FOUNDING OF THE FOUNTAINDALE PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICT

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In Illinois, there is a strong movement to found library districts. The demand for service has given it impetus. In this study, the author intends to trace the civic interest on the part of the citizens; the apparent need of this Township area; the role of humanitarianism, self-education, and recreation in the founding of the Fountaindale Public Library District during the period from October, 1967, to February, 1970.[1]

As far as the Fountaindale Public Library District is concerned, it comprises all of Du Page Township, located in the extreme northern part of Will County, Illinois. This includes the greater part of the Village of Romeoville, Illinois, the Village of Bolingbrook, and all of the unincorporated area located within the boundaries of this Township. Since its organization as a Township in 1850, Du Page has had a reputation of not sparing expense to maintain a high level of education.[2]

Books are thought to be an aid to a better-informed and

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[1]Jaycees, Romeoville Chapter, "Founding of the Fountaindale Library District, Project Record of the Romeoville Jaycees, October 4, 1967, to February 14, 1970," Romeoville, Ill., p. 1. (Typewritten.)

[2]History of Will County, Will County Bicentennial Commemorative Edition (Joliet, Ill.: Peterson Printing Craftsmen, 1973), pp. 533-34.

useful citizenry, and libraries can always use every inducement for tax money that is applicable to education.[3] So it seemed inevitable that, with the rapid growth of this Township, and the leadership in the communities giving the movement impetus, that libraries would be built.

Evolving from the "free public library" movement, public library districts were first authorized by the Illinois Legislature in 1957. At first, the public library district was not popular because the tax rate was limited to .06 per cent compared to .08 per cent and .12 per cent for city libraries. In 1967, the district library law was recodified. The district form of library was then viewed more favorably by the State Library. So in the future the district library will benefit to a greater degree than other types from State and Federal funds. The maximum tax rate for establishment of a district library is 15 cents against every $100 assessed valuation of any taxable property.[4]

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[3]Sidney Herbert Ditzion, Arsenals of a Democratic Culture, with a Foreword by Merle Curti (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947), pp. 22-23.

[4]Hinsdale (Ill.), Suburban Library System, "Advantages and Disadvantages of District Library Type of Organization." (Mimeographed.)

In forming a library district, rather than a municipal or township public library, there are three key advantages. The board of the district has authority to take action without approval from some other government body. The area of service is not limited, as is the case with the municipal or township library. The board has full control of taxing powers, bonding powers, and expenditure of funds, subject in certain instances to referendum.

When converting from another type of library to a library district, there are some minor disadvantages. When there has been a debt incurred by the municipality for the public library, the municipality is still liable for this debt. Municipal retirement plans for library employees will no longer be valid. However, the advantages outweigh any temporary disadvantages.[5]

Before we begin the background of this area, parenthetically, Du Page Township was settled in the winter of 1830-31.[6] The individuals who came to this area

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[5]Ibid.

[6]The residents call this winter of 1830-31, the winter of the deep snow. There were four feet of snow on the ground continuously for two months, according to William Wallace Stevens, Past and Present of Will County, Illinois (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1907), p. 75.

were, in the majority, from New England, and these early settlers worked for the good of humanity through difficult years of severe weather, war, and difficult labor. They settled in the timbered area because at that time the pioneers thought that the prairie was worthless. In 1870, the population of the entire Township was 1,118, and, in 1878, there was still no village within its boundaries.[7] It may be that there was no interest in a library because as late as 1928, the Township was entirely agricultural, and libraries are known to be an urban development.[8]

In the whole Joliet area, in 1836, (when the Illinois-Michigan Canal was being built) the only buildings outside of Chicago were at Lockport, Illinois. At this time towns were laid out along the canal, and one of these towns was Romeoville, four miles above Lockport. Romeoville was surrounded by limestone quarries, but this town never seemed to grow to the extent of Lockport and Joliet, Illinois. Lockport is located in Lockport Township, and part of the Village of Romeoville is in

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[7]History of Will County, Will County Bicentennial Commemorative Edition, p. 525.

[8]Ray E. Held, Public Libraries in California, 1849-1878 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 122.

Lockport Township, but the greater part is located in the southeastern corner of Du Page Township. The Township always had good highways, the deep waterway was built, and this area was fast becoming a logical site for factory and home sites away from the congested area of Chicago.[9]

The Village of Romeoville grew slowly, at first, but when the exodus to suburbia started, its growth was phenomenal. Romeoville was incorporated as a Village in 1895, yet, as late as 1950, there were only approximately 147 people within the Village. In 1957, over six hundred acres of farm land on the west bank of the Des Plaines River on Illinois highway 53 were annexed to the Village of Romeoville for a subdivision development named Hampton Park. In 1964, another section of four hundred forty-six acres, which had been joined to the subdivision were annexed. These annexations of land, in addition to the purchase of water and disposal systems, and a Civic Center, from the Hampton Park builder acquired a new distinction for the village--the fastest growing village

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[9]August Maue, History of Will County, Illinois (Topeka, Kan.: Historical Publishing Company, 1928), 1:196-198.

in Will County.[10] From 197 residents in 1957, the population increased to 3,574 in 1960, and by 1971, Romeoville had reached approximately 13,000, with 1974, estimated at 17,000.[11]

New churches and new industry have opened in the Village, and a recreation district was formed. In 1971, a unit school district was formed, and Lockport Township High School, where Romeoville youths had attended, became Romeoville High School. Romeoville could not build buildings fast enough to accommodate the students so they have used the 45-15 year-round school plan.[12] And they now have three grade schools, one junior high, and one high school.

In the early 1960's, individuals settled in the Du Page Township rural area and formed a Home Owners' Association. In 1965, these individuals petitioned the State of Illinois to incorporate as the Village of Bolingbrook. When incorporated, there were approximately 8,500 inhabitants, and since that time

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[10]Romeoville (Ill.), "History of Romeoville," In files at Municipal Office. (Mimeographed.)

[11]Interview with W. Barry Baker, Village Manager, Municipal Office, Romeoville, Ill., 8 November 1974.

[12]"History of Romeoville."

Bolingbrook has more than tripled in size.[13] The entire Village is well planned. There is a Planning Commission with zoning ordinances, and Bolingbrook has a Park District. There are many shopping centers, but the only industry is Johnson & Johnson located at the edge of the Village. The Village has four grade schools, one junior high in the process of being built, and there is one high school.[14] An indication of the desire of the citizens to found a library is expressed by their willingness to tax themselves for education. Culturally, there was nothing to enhance this area until the Public Library District was formed.

With Du Page Township growing 324 per cent between 1969 and 1970, Will County officials have prepared for their County's inevitable growth. Will County is the third fastest growing county in the State. Seventy per cent of the County is still prime farm land. So this County asks the advice of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, and has a Planning Commission of its own. Will County towns can use County

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[13]"Will Won't Grow Down Without a Fight," Elk Grove Village (Ill.) Suburban Week, 11 and 12 September 1974.

[14]Interview with Nancy Hunt, Park View School, Romeoville, Ill., 18 November 1974.

funds and guidance for their individual development.[15]

So in Du Page Township there was an area which had grown both in numbers of people and in financial assets. At the time the Library District was proposed, this Township, which comprises the town of Bolingbrook, the major part of Romeoville, and the unincorporated area in between, had a population of 19,000. The assessed valuation of Du Page Township had grown from $25,878,804 in 1960, to $60,867,998 in 1969.[16]

In Romeoville, the Jaycees have always been a very active group. In 1965, with Arnold Vito Martinez, as Chairman, the Jaycees were credited with passing a Mosquito Abatement District referendum, which had the largest positive vote ever recorded in Will County. Establishing this District gave the Jaycees and Arnold Martinez good background knowledge to use when they started working to form a library in 1966.

The Jaycees, both in Romeoville and Bolingbrook, were the only groups who actively worked to establish the library. Approval was granted by their Boards of Directors, and their general membership. Every member

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[15]Suburban Week, 11 and 12 September 1974, p. 2.

[16]Romeoville (Ill.) Beacon, 19 November 1969.

was encouraged to participate, and there was an anticipated non-Jaycee participation of two hundred workers. Individual support was stressed rather than group participation. The Jaycees were very careful regarding political and religious connotations.[17]

Every library is a social agency so at the base of forming a new district there must be conditions favorable to its establishment. The citizens must approve its establishment; the citizens must approve education for their young and old alike; and the citizens must have an income sufficiently large to tax themselves for the building and upkeep of a library. There must be present a certain amount of civic pride and prominent individuals to undergird the movement. It is because these things were present in this area, that the Jaycees gained local support.

As the reader will see, the Fountaindale Public Library District was instigated as the response to a Community Attitude Survey, which was sponsored in the community of Romeoville, in 1967, by the Jaycees. In this Survey 63 per cent of the residents responded that the two things primarily needed in the Village were a

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[17]Jaycees, Romeoville Chapter, "Founding of the Fountaindale Library District."

library and a community center. Of those polled, only 7 per cent were college graduates, 35 per cent had some college, and 43 per cent had completed high school.[18] It is unique for a public library to head the list of facilities most needed in a community, and this request prompted the Jaycee study.

The Jaycee Project to establish a library in Romeoville was designed in three Stages: Study Stage, Exploratory Stage, and Accomplishment Stage. The Study Stage progressed throughout 1967-1968, exploring the feasibility of founding a library in Romeoville. Serving as Chairman of this Committee was a Jaycee member, Eugene Gerber, who was enthusiastic about forming a library, and he generated his enthusiasm to his Committee of six Jaycees and Dorothy Goodwin, President of the Jay-shees (a women's organization of Jaycee wives), who communicated for this Committee. Also, Arnold Vito Martinez, a Jaycee member was strategy formulator. It was the task of this Committee to gather sufficient information to generate the interest of the Village Trustees, so that these Trustees would appoint

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[18] Ibid.

an Exploratory Committee to consider the legal aspects for establishing a library in Romeoville. Libraries were visited, and approximately thirty Committee and thirty Sub-Committee meetings (meetings with Village Trustees and others) were held. During this period many contacts were made, both personally and by letter. Federal aid was sought by Dorothy Goodwin through correspondence with Congressman Erlenborn, who referred the Committee to the State Library. The Village Trustees were kept informed of the Project and of its progress. On December 6, 1967, Rubin Prince, President of the Jaycees, informed Neil Murphy, Mayor, by letter that the Committee had ascertained the need for a library in the community, and that the Project was practicable.[19]

Again, on January 6, 1968, Rubin Prince contacted Neil Murphy by letter, and asked that an Exploratory Committee be appointed, which was the second phase of the Jaycee Project to found a library in Romeoville. The Exploratory Committee, which was established on January 17, 1968, had to secure funds to make a study of the best possible procedure for establishing a library. The Committee asked the Village of Romeoville Trustees to

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[19]Ibid.

loan them $7,400 to make the study.[20] If the library was formed, the money would be repaid; if not, the loan would be forgiven. It was necessary to have money for legal consul and other expenses. The Committee met with Mr. Charles De Young, Director of Bur Oak Library System and with Peter Pappas, Legal Consultant to the Illinois State Library. Mr. Pappas informed the Committee of alternatives for forming a library. Just as the Exploratory Committee neared completion of its task, the Committee approached Bolingbrook to solicit their support to join Romeoville in forming a library district, which would encompass the entire Township. The Committee was interested in an expanded tax base.[21] On July 3, 1968, the report of the Exploratory Committee was presented at a Village meeting. The Village Trustees requested the Exploratory Committee to submit the names

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[20]The actual amount of money which the Committee borrowed from the Village of Romeoville was $6,078.43. This was voted to be repaid to the Village, at the organizational meeting of the first Board of Trustees of the Fountaindale Public Library District, according to the Minutes of the Corporation, meeting of 20 January 1970.

[21]At the time of the Project, if Romeoville had chosen to establish a District comprising only that part of the Village which was in Du Page Township, its assessed valuation would have been Twenty-Eight Million; by taking in the entire Du Page Township, the assessed valuation was Fifty-One Million, as mentioned by Arnold Vito Martinez in an interview, 18 November 1974.

for the Accomplishment Stage Committee. Members of the Accomplishment Committee were to be representative of the entire Township; four from Romeoville, two from Bolingbrook, and one from the unincorporated area. The Exploratory Committee presented four alternatives to the Village Trustees for establishment of a library in Romeoville.

The first alternative was to hold a referendum to establish a Village library. As has been pointed out, the Village of Romeoville lies within Lockport and Du Page Townships. If a referendum were held to establish a Village library, the portion of the Village lying within Lockport Township would have double taxation; first, to the presently established Lockport Township Library; second, to the proposed Village library. Only a portion of the taxes collected within Lockport Township would be collectible by the Village. Inasmuch as the total levy of the Village library would have to be reduced, this alternative was not feasible.

The second alternative was to petition Lockport Township Library to convert to a library district. This would be subject to voter approval. Upon the conversion of Lockport Township Library to a district and upon the referendum approval by Romeoville voters,

Lockport would move toward annexation of Romeoville into their district. Romeoville would have to be satisfied that they would receive services worth the amount of the tax. This would have an ultimate goal of Romeoville being a branch library of Lockport Township Library. The Committee were aware that the procedure for securing this goal was too complicated, as Lockport Township had a history of rejecting any proposal which would benefit Romeoville.

The third alternative was to establish a library district within the Village of Romeoville which would exclude that portion lying in Lockport Township. The Committee perceived that this solution was not reasonable because it would cause confusion. There are now two water utility systems in Romeoville, and this presents difficulties.

The fourth alternative was to appoint a working committee in the Village of Romeoville with specific instructions to form the Du Page Township Public Library District. This alternative had the support of the Exploratory Committee, who also recommended that library facilities be established simultaneously within the Village boundaries of each of the two municipalities in Du Page Township. Finally, the Exploratory Committee

recommended that, when the Township Library District was formed, this District join and participate in the Bur Oak Library System.[22]

With the decision to propose a library district, the work of the Exploratory Committee was terminated on the third day of July, 1968. The Committee report was well received by the Village Trustees. Mayor Murphy commented that the report was the most complete investigation by a Committee, which he had seen, in his forty years as Mayor.[23]

On November 6, 1968, approval was given by the Village Trustees for a Committee of seven to serve in the Accomplishment Stage. If the library district was voted to be formed, this Committee would serve as the first board of trustees of the newly formed district: Eugene Ennis, John Frangella, Nancy Hunt, Arnold Vito Martinez, Earl Meisinger, Leo Osborne, and Jeanne Wulfing (a librarian). An organizational meeting of

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[22]A library system coordinates member libraries so that they can pool their resources and offer more materials and services than any one library could provide. All library systems are financed by the general revenue fund of the State of Illinois, and the local library pays nothing to join, as stated in the "Glenwood Public Library District Referendum Newsletter" (Glenwood, Ill., June 1974), p. 2.

[23]Jaycees, Romeoville Chapter, "Founding of the Fountaindale Library District."

this Committee was held on December 23, 1968, in the Council Room of the Village Hall. Present at this meeting were Albert Trezza, the Chairman of the Library Development Committee for the State of Illinois; Alex Ladenson, a lawyer and Director of Chicago Public Library; Mrs. Brixie, a Librarian of Joliet Public Library; and library officials representing the five counties which comprise the Bur Oak Library System. Edgar J. Ballard, Jr. was approved as attorney of the Project.

As other districts throughout Illinois have been formed, the fifty-one strongly enthusiastic Jaycees were instrumental in forming this District. The process was costly and time-consuming. First of all, the voters of this proposed District had to petition the Circuit Court containing all or the larger portion of the proposed territory. The petition had to have one hundred or more signatures of registered voters. The boundaries of this proposed District had to be described, and a name found for it. The Beacon offered a prize of Twenty-Five Dollars to anyone who could name the District. James Bingle named the District Fountaindale,[24] which was the first name given to the first settlement in Du Page

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[24]James Bingle found his historical information in the Romeoville Beacon, 13 October 1966.

Township.[25] Submission of the question of establishment of this Library District to the voters within the proposed District had to be requested. The petitioners were required to secure the day and date of the hearing on the petition; to publish a notice of the time, date, and place of the hearing and its purpose; and to appear at the hearing. At the hearing, any person could have testified for or against the petition (however, no one dissented), and the judge then would enter his order either dismissing or granting the petition. As the petition for the Fountaindale Public Library District was granted, certain matters had to be included in the final order. The referendum was required to be held sixty days after entry of the court order. Immediately, campaigning started in public meetings, by radio, by newspaper, and 6,000 flyers were sent home by the school children. Polling places must be provided. Because there were two municipalities more than one-and-one-half miles apart and an unincorporated area in between, three polling places were required, with a separate count in each polling place. Each polling place must have a

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[25]The State of Illinois Library Development Committee suggested that the Committee avoid choosing a name which indicated geographic boundaries, as written in the "Founding of the Fountaindale Library District" (Romeoville, Ill., 1972).

majority vote to carry this District. The referendum was held on December 20, 1969, and the polls were open from 12 noon to 6:30 P. M., at three polling places, as stipulated. In Romeoville, the vote was 150 for and 117 against; in Bolingbrook, the issue just succeeded with 58 voting for it and 51 against it; the rural, or unincorporated areas had the best positive vote percentage, 60 for and 36 against.[26] The Library District was established in Du Page Township with fifty-six-and-one-half per cent of the voters approving.[27] Their work finalized, the report of the Accomplishment Committee was presented to the Village Trustees on January 21, 1970, and the Committee disbanded to become the first Board of Trustees of the Fountaindale Public Library District.[28] This Library District is now a functioning unit.

Working toward this goal the Jaycees and the individuals who worked so diligently to have a successful referendum envisioned the library as a center for self-education. A favorable cultural milieu

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[26]Romeoville (Ill.) Beacon, 24 December 1969.

[27]Downers Grove (Ill.) Southwest Graphic, 30 December 1969.

[28]Jaycees, Romeoville Chapter, "Founding of the Fountaindale Library District."

had made possible two buildings whose occupants, the librarians and aids, would provide information and education to meet the local needs and to enhance Du Page Township culturally. Because of the rapidly increasing population, all of the ills of urbanization were coming to this Township, and the libraries and librarians would provide one means of harmless recreation for the young.

Since the Library District vote was very light, there seemed to be an apathy among the voters. It was the tireless efforts of the Jaycees, the Committees, and interested community leaders, constantly publicizing the District, which brought the Library District to fruition. Three of these persons deserve special mention because they were interested in more than buildings. Since the founding of the District, they have served as officers of the first Board, in addition to serving in the planning stages, and two of them are still officers.

Arnold Vito Martinez was President of this Library District's first Board of Trustees. He envisioned the library from a humanitarian aspect. From early childhood he has always been interested in helping his fellow man. Arnold Vito Martinez was born on March 29, 1930, in Chicago. His parents had immigrated from

Mexico with five children; Arnold and one brother were born in the United States. Arnold Martinez married a girl from Iowa and had a son and a daughter by this marriage. Having worked for Commonwealth Edison Company since 1956, he moved to Romeoville in 1960. He has always been active in organizations and dedicated to his community. He is presently a member of the board of the Unit School District.[29]

Nancy Hunt served as Secretary of this first Board of Trustees. She moved to Bolingbrook in 1961, living there when the Village was incorporated. She has taught a primary unit for eleven years in the Park View School in Romeoville, and has always been energetic in organizations. She attends Du Page Presbyterian Church, was an auditor for the Township, a member of the Plan Commission for Bolingbrook, a Republican Committeeman, and still serves as Secretary of the Library District. She visualizes the library as a self-educating center.[30]

Since the founding of this District, Leo Osborne

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[29]Interview with Arnold Vito Martinez, Park View School, Romeoville, Ill., 18 November 1974.

[30]Interview with Nancy Hunt, Park View School, Romeoville, Ill., 18 November 1974.

has served as Treasurer of the Board of Trustees, having lived in Romeoville for thirteen years. He is married, has three sons, attends United Presbyterian Church, and is a Boy Scout Master. He was a Village Trustee, and was on the Plan Commission for Romeoville. To Leo Osborne, the library has a two-fold purpose in a community. It supports public education at all levels, and it provides recreation. Serving as an information center, it expands the opportunities of the community.[31]

Along with these dedicated people, there were hundreds who promoted the District in many small, but significant, ways. Community leadership was a vital force in the establishment of the Fountaindale Public Library District. Working with this leadership, were Village Trustees with foresight, and a favorable press: The Beacon, the Southwest Graphic, and the Joliet Herald-News. The radio stations--WJOL, AM & FM; WJRT, AM; and WAJP, AM & FM--were an asset too.

In conclusion, because of the rapid growth of Du Page Township and a financial base which was sufficient to support a library, the residents required library information, education, and a cultural uplift

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[31]Interview with Leo Osborne, at home, 405 Everette Ave., Romeoville, Ill., 16 December 1974.

which were fulfilled through establishing an agency of enlightenment for adult and youth alike. Self-education might eventually ease the plight of the school drop-outs. Civic pride and historical records would be preserved, and a place of harmless recreation would be provided for the young. In studying the causes of the Founding of the Fountaindale Public Library District, the reader will note that multiple motivation still exists: education, civic pride, historical research, humanitarianism, recreation, and each person's individual needs.

With the enthusiasm and earnest campaigning of the Jaycees in Romeoville and Bolingbrook and of interested individuals in Du Page Township, the Fountaindale Public Library District has kept its promise to the voters, two library buildings are nearing completion; one in Romeoville, and the other in Bolingbrook. Temporary library facilities are being used in the Park View School in Romeoville.

The Fountaindale Public Library District is a member of the Bur Oak Library System, disseminating information and educating through books, audio-visual materials, and other media. In the 1970's, public libraries are trying to fulfill all kinds of cultural needs which have been caused by technological changes,

at the same time that they are trying to educate and provide harmless recreation. The majority of public libraries belong to larger system libraries, which eventually will be part of a national and world-wide network to serve the whole needs of the people of each nation.

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